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REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES: QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS

SECURITY COUNCIL
Fifty-fourth year

Letter dated 8 June 1999 from the Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit a press release issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea on 5 June 1999, which revisits Ethiopia's violation of human rights of the Eritrean population by way of aerial bombardment over the past year.

I should be grateful if you would kindly circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Haile MENKERIOS
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Press release issued on 5 June 1999 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Eritrea

ETHIOPIA'S INEXORABLE DRIVE TOWARDS FULL-SCALE WAR

Exactly one year ago, at approximately 2.20 p.m., Ethiopian MIG fighter jets bombed Asmara, Eritrea's capital, in what was the first use of aircraft and a major escalation of what, until then, had been a localized border conflict.

The bombing of Asmara occurred on the morrow of a public announcement by Ethiopia's Prime Minister, who told his domestic audience through the local TV and radio that the Ethiopian armed forces had been given orders that day to take all necessary measures to repulse Eritrea's aggression. The Ethiopian Prime Minister gave the orders for escalating the war in spite of Addis Ababa's parallel announcement the same day that it had accepted the United States-Rwanda recommendations.

Forced to react, the Eritrean Air Force bombed the military airport in Mekele, destroying several fighter aircraft. In the retaliatory strikes, stray bombs caused damage to a school, resulting in unfortunate casualties. The Government of Eritrea promptly apologized for the unintentional loss of human life.

Ethiopia again used its air force to bomb Asmara the following day, stopping only after two of its planes were shot down by Eritrean air defence.

The United States brokered a moratorium on air strikes on 14 June, although Ethiopia rejected Eritrean proposals for a total ban on air strikes as a first step towards a comprehensive cessation of hostilities.

The introduction of air strikes by Ethiopia a full year ago takes on a disturbing significance now. In retrospect, the Ethiopian air strikes on 5 June must be seen as a significant reflection of the regime's decision to pursue war, not peace, with Eritrea.

In February this year, after several months of intensive efforts by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and other concerned parties, Ethiopia jumped the gun once again in a clear move to thwart peace. This time, however, the offensives unleashed by Ethiopia had all the characteristics of a total war. This occurred despite the OAU peace process that was in motion and in contravention of international calls (OAU, Security Council) for both sides to observe maximum restraint.

Ethiopia's bogus pretext for launching its attack in February were fictitious claims of Eritrean air strikes on Adi-Grat. Again, the timing of the attack reveals a considered decision to impede peace with continued fighting.

The second phase of the Tigre People's Liberation Front (TPLF) offensives became the venue for an Ethiopian air campaign that selected civilian targets

deep in Eritrea and far from disputed territories. The decision to again resort to air attacks in this period was in contravention of the moratorium on air strikes. Ethiopia's random air raids in the past three months included:

- 7 February, residential quarter in Adi Qualla;
- 8 February, residential quarter in Adi Qualla;
- 9 February, displacement camps in Deda Lalai;
- 6-9 February, villages in Zalambessa and environs;
- 21 February, villages of Menka'ka and Adin (Assab);
- 22 February, town of Tsorona;
- 3 March, Hazemo and environs;
- 16 March, town centre in Kinafina;
- 18-19 March, central market in Shambuko;
- 29 March, Adi Keshi and Koferenko;
- 15 April, church in Adi Kcieh and Mendefora;
- 28 April, Bimbina;
- 15 May, Zalambessa;
- 16 May, warehouse in Massawa.

Around 80 Eritrean civilians were either killed or maimed as a result of these strikes. Whole villages (Shambuko), residential quarters, a church, food storage facilities and warehouses were destroyed.

The year since Ethiopia bombed Asmara has illustrated the scale of Ethiopia's intentions and the means by which the TPLF regime is prepared to continually escalate the conflict to deter peace. In one year, Ethiopia has carried out the expulsion of close to 60,000 Eritrean civilians. In one year, Ethiopia has used its mercenary-led air force to attack innocent civilians throughout Eritrea. In one year, Ethiopia has consistently rejected a ceasefire. In one year, Ethiopia has repeatedly, and actively, thwarted efforts for peace. And yet, the border crisis was easily solvable from the outset and remains solvable if the TPLF regime were serious about peace.